

# State high court disbars former appellate judge

Alleged improper spending and intervention in his son's legal woes are cited.

BY BARBARA HOBEROCK  
World Capitol Bureau

OKLAHOMA CITY — The Oklahoma Supreme Court on Tuesday disbarred former Court of Criminal Appeals Judge Stephen E. Lile

of Lawton.

The Supreme Court rejected recommendations by the Oklahoma Bar Association and a Professional Responsibility Tribunal because of "the seriousness of the respondent's misconduct while serving in his position as a judge on the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals," an opinion states.

Lile also must pay the \$892 cost of the proceedings.

A panel of the Professional Responsibility Tribunal had

recommended a suspension of two years and one day; the Bar Association had recommended public censure.

Lile was under investigation by Attorney General Drew Edmondson's office when he resigned in 2005 amid allegations of improper spending and intervention in a criminal case involving his son, Loren Michael Wilson.

Wilson is the son of Lile and his former Court of Criminal Appeals administrative assistant, Dawn Lukasik.

The opinion said Lile traveled to corrections facilities where his son was incarcerated but billed the state.

After an audit requested by the Court of Criminal Appeals, Lile reimbursed the state "to avoid the appearance of a conflict."

"These travel claims were signed by the respondent under oath and under penalty of perjury," the Supreme Court opinion notes.

In August 2005, Lile began submitting reimbursement

claims for some items that were personal and not related to the remodeling of his office, the opinion said.

The opinion also said Lile got involved when Lukasik was arrested by Lawton police in December 2004.

"The respondent stipulated that he had created the perception of undue influence on the district attorney to decline to prosecute," the Supreme Court opinion states.

The Professional Respon-

sibility Tribunal found that Lile discredited the legal profession when he attempted to influence the criminal case involving his son, the opinion said.

It also found that he abused his position when he interfered with his son's incarceration, the opinion said.

Lile and his attorneys did not return calls seeking comment on his disbarment.

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## Children step up for care

State lawmakers attend Tulsa's version of Step Up for Kids Day.

BY JARREL WADE  
World Staff Writer

Students from Mayo Demonstration Elementary School and a group of state legislators met Tuesday in downtown Tulsa to raise awareness about issues concerning children in 2008 political campaigns.

The Parent Child Center of Tulsa organized the event, part of Step Up for Kids Day, a national campaign that included events in 48 states and Washington, D.C.

Dr. Robert Block, chairman of the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center-Tulsa's Department of Pediatrics, warned of developmental problems and the long-term effects they have on children.

Block said about 20 percent of all children have some kind of developmental disorder that a doctor needs to acknowledge when treating a child.

"My wish for you is that before these campaigns are over, you will find a way to ask these candidates to focus on children," Block said.

After the speech, about 50 fourth- and fifth-graders questioned a panel of state legislators that included state Sen. Tom Adelson, D-Tulsa; state Sen. Judy Eason-McIntyre, D-Tulsa; state Rep. Jabbar Shumate, D-Tulsa; and several other local incumbents and candidates.

The students asked ques-



Students at Mayo Demonstration Elementary School try to raise awareness of issues facing children by marching in the nearby neighborhood. Tuesday was Step Up for Kids Day.

MICHAEL WYKE/Tulsa World

### Oklahoma children by the numbers

Of the 853,336 children younger than 18 in Oklahoma

- 212,672 lived in poverty in 2006.
- 114,000 weren't covered by health insurance in 2006.
- 351,000 depended on the government for health care in 2006.
- 36,952 were abused in 2005.
- 210 were abused to the point of death between 2000 and 2005.

Source: tulsaworld.com/everychildmatters

tions about child welfare, including raising more money for special-needs schools that are public and free.

McIntyre fielded that ques-

tion, saying it would take a nonpartisan approach to address the issue adequately and get more money for that type of program.

"That will be on the table always to try to get that done," she said.

Other questions focused on child abuse, hunger, inadequate living conditions and health insurance.

After the conference ended, the children went on a march in the neighborhood near their school to raise awareness about children in their community, Mayo Principal Andy McKenzie said.

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## State's teacher of the year is Jenks grad

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — An eighth-grade algebra teacher at an inner-city Oklahoma City middle school was named Oklahoma's 2009 teacher of the year Tuesday.

Taft Middle School teacher Heather Sparks, who has taught for 15 years in the metro area, was selected from among 12 finalists from four regions across the state.

A graduate of Jenks High School, Sparks, 39, said her desire to teach was fueled by her high school geometry teacher, Alice Ward.

Although Sparks began college as a music major, "I realized after a few months that's not really where my heart was," she said.

"Teaching is a profession that you're called to," Sparks said during a ceremony at the Oklahoma State Fair. "It's a passion of mine. I love my job. I've always loved working with kids and watching them grow and change."

Sparks said she particularly enjoys teaching mathematics and applying a "real-world" approach to teaching that engages her students.

"A textbook isn't going to engage kids," she said. "The more wondering we can get kids doing, the better they're going to find success more easily. When they come to school, I want them to be ready and excited to come to math, so I try to prepare lessons that will do that for them."

Sparks received bachelor's and master's degrees from Oklahoma City University and has National Board certification.

State Superintendent Sandy Garrett said the 12 finalists



### TEACHING IS HER PASSION

**Heather Sparks:** The algebra teacher for eighth-graders at Taft Middle School says she loves teaching math and working with children. The only drawback to receiving this award, she says, is having to leave her classroom for a year.

are all outstanding teachers who honor their profession.

"All of the finalists represent the best of the best," she said. "The passion each of them has to serving the children of our state is awe-inspiring and worthy of our respect and appreciation."

Among the finalists were Betsy Ellen Glad of Union Public Schools; Cheryl McCord of Jenks Public Schools; and Denise Radcliff of Claremore Public Schools.

Sparks' principal, Lisa Johnson, said the teacher also inspires her colleagues.

"Heather can be counted on to cheer us all on to more, faster, harder and with more determination," she said.

Along with the honor, Sparks received a prize package valued at \$50,000, including tuition waivers at all the state's major universi-

ties and the use of a Toyota Prius hybrid for one year. She will serve as the state's "Ambassador of Teaching," traveling across the state to conduct professional development courses and speak to parents, educators and colleges of education students.

Sparks also will represent Oklahoma in the national teacher of the year contest.

The only drawback, she said, is leaving her classroom and her students for a year.

"Because I'm so passionate, ... it is a little heartbreaking to know I'm going to have to leave my kids," she said.

The Oklahoma Legislature annually provides the funding for a full-time, certified substitute to replace the teacher of the year, the state Education Department said.

The state selection committee is composed of civic and business leaders and professionals from the field of journalism. The 12 finalists were chosen by four regional committees, who selected three finalists each from the local teachers of the year from their regions.



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### KEEPING IT LOCAL



**Billie Letts:** "I've always thought that if I could ever become a writer of any acclaim at all, if I could just get a book published, I'd like to set it in Italy, or maybe I'd like to go to England, or I'd like to go to France. Instead, I went to Wal-Mart."

## Noted author tells of writing's demons

BY DENVER NICKS  
World Staff Writer

Acclaimed fiction writer Billie Letts says writing can be a challenge for all writers at times.

"I think all writers suffer from writer's block, and if some writer tells me she doesn't — 'I just sit down and write from beginning to end' — I don't like her anyway," she joked.

Letts, a native Tulsan, spoke Tuesday at the Tulsa Press Club about her writing processes, storytelling and her new book, "Made in the USA."

"When the writing is going well, I can stay at the typewriter for eight or 10 hours," said Letts, who added that she does her best writing in the evening.

"When the writing's not going well, it's hell to pay. Nobody wants to be around me then."

Letts began writing her first novel, "Where the Heart Is," at age 54, but her literary accolades began earlier.

She won the prestigious Walker Percy Literary Award in 1994 at the New Orleans Writers Conference.

It was at that conference that she met her agent, who suggested that Letts turn a short story she had written into a novel.

"Where the Heart Is" eventually was selected for Oprah's Book Club, becoming a No. 1 New York Times Best Seller and a major motion picture.

Letts has since written three more novels, most based in Oklahoma.

"I've always thought that if I could ever become a writer of any acclaim at all, if I could just get a book published, I'd like to set it in Italy, or maybe I'd like to go to England, or I'd like to go to France," she said.

"Instead, I went to Wal-Mart."

Like her others, Letts' new book begins with characters who have been pushed to society's margins.

When the guardian of two children suddenly dies, the brother and sister travel on their own to Las Vegas to find the father who abandoned them.

Letts cited a reviewer who criticized the novel, saying she treated her characters "inhumanely."

"Well, the world can prove to be a pretty inhumane place," Letts said, noting that 800,000 children disappear every year in the United States.

Letts is not the only member of her talented family to win acclaim.

Her son, playwright Tracy Letts, won five Tony awards and the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for his hit play "August: Osage County."

Her late husband, Dennis Letts, was a university professor for many years before beginning a successful career in television and film.

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